Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office

Bureau du défenseur des droits des malades mentaux

8th Floor, Suncor Building, 56 Wellesley Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2S3 / Telephone 927-1575 & 963-2596

June 22, 1989

Mr. Chris Brown
6267 Castille Ct.
Orleans, Ontario
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Dear Mr. Brown;

I have received your letter of May 1, 1989 following our conversation. Thank you for including Dr. Rootman's name. He has recently sent me the bibliography on environmental factors affecting health, and I am looking forward to reviewing it.

In our conversation you said that many patients in psychiatric facilities are likely mis-diagnosed as having mental illnesses, when they are really experiencing a reaction to a toxic agent in their environment (for example, carpet glue). I agree that it would be a tragedy to detain and administer psychiatric treatment to a person who is exhibiting psychiatric symptoms only as a result of an allergic reaction, particularly when the patient asserts a relationship between a toxic agent and the current symptoms.

The correlation between toxic agents and psychiatric symptoms has not yet gained acceptance in the traditional medical community. You said the doctor should simply believe the patient. From my experience, I do not think I would have much success in convincing a hospital psychiatrist to abandon his or her diagnosis and proposed psychiatric treatment and instead order, for example, that all the carpet on the ward be ripped out, on the strength of the patient's assertion alone. As I explained to you, I have had little success even in convincing some psychiatrists that being locked up in hospital for weeks without a breath of fresh air is bad for one's mental health.

That is why I suggested that we could not begin to expect cooperation from psychiatrists in this area without first persuading them the problem exists. If an allergic response to a toxic substance operates on an organic level, it could be demonstrated, for example, in repeated double-blind experiments. I asked you for any clinical literature reporting on such experiments, so I can learn more about the area, and pass it along to our advocates in the field, who in turn can use them in raising physicans' awareness of the issue.

I am sorry that you dismiss this approach as "illogical". I believe that clinically verifiable measures of the problem are essential if we are to persuade hospital physicians to seriously consider environmental factors affecting health.

Your letter was copied to "Marty Schreiter, O.H.R.C." Please feel free to forward this response to him, as well.

Sincerely,

David Giuffrida

David Giuffrida
Legal Counsel